

What does this mean for water users?

Washington water law is based on the prior appropriation doctrine — “first in time, first in right.” This means the full measure of senior water rights take priority over any portion of water rights established later. This includes adopted instream flows, which are streamflow levels set in rule that are protected from further appropriation.

When water supplies are low, junior water uses may be curtailed to protect senior rights, including any senior instream flows that would be impaired by the use. There are some areas of the state where junior water uses receive curtailment orders nearly every year, but in low water years they may occur earlier than normal.

How are domestic wells impacted?

Domestic wells operating under the groundwater exemption may also be impacted by dry conditions. Low water levels can be caused by many things and Ecology is generally unable to regulate between exempt well users.

People experiencing well problems should monitor water levels, repair the water system and/or possibly deepen or drill a new well. This should be done before Ecology may be able to intervene.

Licensed well drillers are in demand right now, which means you should reach out as soon as you think you have a problem.

What can I do to help?

Use water wisely. In some of our systems, the water you are using has a direct impact on streamflows and aquatic life. In cities, residential lawn watering is the biggest use of water in the summer months. Simple changes can help us stretch the water supplies we have, including watering lawns sparingly, watering in the early morning or planting drought-tolerant plants.

Where can I find help?

While Ecology is the state agency responsible for declaring drought, we’re not the only agency involved in drought relief. Various state agencies share responsibility for helping people get through drought emergencies.

- For drinking water emergencies due to the drought, please contact the Washington Department of Health’s Office of Drink Water Hotline at 1-877-481-4901.
- For fish health emergencies due to the drought, please contact the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Fish Program at 360-902-2700.
- For agricultural emergencies (potential for loss of life of agricultural animals or crops) due to the drought, please contact the Washington State Conservation Commission at 509-385-7509.

To report a complaint related to water use:

Online: ecology.wa.gov/Footer/Report-an-environmental-issue

Email: eroertscoordinator@ecy.wa.gov

Phone: 509-329-3400

Other questions related to water rights or curtailments:

Contact: Sheri McMicheal

Email: Sheri.McMicheal@ecy.wa.gov

Phone: 509-329-3541

ADA accommodation

To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6831 or email at ecyadacoordinator@ecy.wa.gov, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>.

For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.